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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DHS SECRETARY MICHAEL CHERTOFF,
JULY 17-19

¶1. (SBU) Welcome to Mexico City. Mexico remains key to USG success in combating the trafficking of drugs, persons, arms and precursors, terrorism, and other transnational threats. With the recent signing of Merida Initiative funding, we are poised to significantly expand counter drug cooperation and support President Calderon's robust efforts to take down Mexico's drug cartels and improve public security.

Strengthening Law Enforcement

¶2. (SBU) President Calderon remains firm in his commitment to aggressively target violence and criminality and continues to sharpen the capabilities of his law enforcement team. In the past year and a half he has: launched aggressive anti-drug operations in ten states; raised pay for the military; replaced numerous high-ranking federal police officers in an anti-corruption campaign; launched a billion dollar project to create real-time interconnectivity between all police and prosecutors, as well as a unified national crime database; and, stewarded congressional legislation to unify federal police forces and reform the judicial system.

¶3. (SBU) Calderon continues to greatly strengthen law enforcement cooperation with the USG. The GOM has ramped up extraditions to the U.S. - 83 in 2007 and 38 so far this year. The ongoing security campaign has reduced the broad geographic range and legal impunity that the cartels have traditionally enjoyed in Mexico, although progress is tenuous and uneven. Addressing personal security challenges continues to rank as the number one priority in public opinion polls and there is general support among the Mexican public and body politic for expanding bilateral cooperation. The Merida Initiative is only the highest profile element of an emerging pattern of cooperation across the board, which is likely to take on momentum in coming years.

¶4. (SBU) It should be noted that Mexico's military plays a fundamental role in the fight against organized crime, and in particular narco-trafficking. Both SEDENA and SEMAR, at the direction of the President, have devoted significant resources and manpower towards drug, firearms and bulk cash interdictions and eradication.

Stakes Rising for Security Officials

¶5. (SBU) The human price Mexico is paying remains high, with almost 2000 drug related killings so far in 2008, including 194 police and military officials. A new disturbing trend in

recent months has been the slaying of several senior police officials.

Combating Corruption

¶6. (SBU) Turning the page on Mexico's endemic corruption problem is an essential component of President Calderon's efforts to combat organized crime. The Public Administration Secretariat (SFP), created by the Fox administration is at the center of efforts, coordinating a network of IGs in GOM offices. In 2007, SFP reported that the number of investigations conducted and public officials dismissed nearly doubled over the prior year. The Public Security Secretariat (SSP) has undertaken an ambitious program designed to eventually vet all 400,000 of Mexico's federal, state, and local law enforcement officials. Mexico's recently approved judicial reforms should make Mexico's judicial processes more transparent and accessible. Meanwhile, Mexico's military seeks to deepen its cooperative relationship with the U.S., including through the acquisition of U.S. equipment, in large measure out of a desire to reduce the potential for corruption. Mexico has far to go to put its legacy of corruption behind it but it is striking out in the right direction. Deepening U.S. cooperation through the Merida Initiative will advance significantly the GOM's anti-corruption efforts.

Justice Reform

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¶7. (SBU) In June, President Calderon signed into law major judicial reform legislation to facilitate transition to an oral trial system, give law enforcement officials broader search and seizure authority, allow consensual monitoring of telephone calls, and give police more responsibility for conducting investigations. Effective implementation of the legislation will make the Mexican system work more transparently, expeditiously, and fairly. A share of Merida Initiative support is tagged to assist Mexico with putting this improved system into place.

Political Landscape

¶8. (SBU) The president faces a hardening political environment here, in the advent of legislative and key gubernatorial elections next year. The window of opportunity to effectively cooperate with a divided congress on major reform initiatives, such as energy reform, is rapidly closing. While security issues are paramount, prosperity is also a key priority in the minds of most Mexicans. If his programs and policies prove unsuccessful in generating the kind of growth necessary to create sufficient jobs and reduce poverty, Calderon could quickly find himself vulnerable to a reinvigorated political opposition.

U.S.- Mexico Relations

¶9. (SBU) The Calderon government has demonstrated pragmatism in its posture toward the United States and bilateral cooperation, particularly in law enforcement, has never been stronger. However, the failure of immigration reform in the United States was a political setback for the president. The result is that he enjoys less political space in which to openly cooperate with the U.S. on issues of mutual bilateral importance.

Key Issues

10. (SBU) Key Issues During Your Visit Include:

-- Border Security: In FY 2007 there were a total of 1,073 incidents of violence that occurred at/or between the ports of entry against CBP law enforcement personnel, resulting in a 28% increase from FY06 to FY07. The southwest border accounted for 99% of violent assaults against CBP law enforcement personnel for FY07.

The protocols addressing border violence that we entered into with the GOM in 2006 are now in place throughout the entire U.S.-Mexico border. Through these protocols, joint Border Security and Public Safety working groups meet locally on a monthly basis to discuss incidents of and mechanisms to address cross-border violence.

Since the protocols were instituted, the most prevalent challenge has been the lack of GOM response to calls for assistance and/or support. In response to the issue, SSP and CISEN have worked closely to draft a plan of incorporation of Mexico's Federal Police to become an equal partner in the protocols.

The GOM is quick to posture on incidents of violence against undocumented aliens. The occasional cases in which Border Patrol agents (often acting in self-defense) injure or kill undocumented aliens inevitably provoke a sharp reaction here.

Your visit can reinforce our message that we are concerned by the violence that is an unfortunate bi-product of illegal migration and that we need to work together to ensure safe, orderly and legal border crossings, while stemming the flow of illegal migrants. (Note: Mexico has similar problems with violence along its own southern border and the internal treatment of illegal migrants.)

-- The Border Fence: The GOM strongly opposes the

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construction of walls and other border infrastructure. In this regard, minor incidents on the border, associated with infrastructure development, can quickly become public disputes. It should be anticipated that the GOM will state its disapproval of DHS' efforts with SBI and the ongoing fence construction.

-- Less than Lethal Munitions: The GOM strongly opposes the deployment of less-than-lethal munitions (Pepperball Launchers, FN303, etc.) into Mexican territory. The GOM considers the use of these tools an affront to basic human rights and takes the opportunity to criticize DHS' use of them. It should be anticipated that the GOM will state their opposition to this tactic.

-- Navarro-Montes: The GOM has continuously supported the USG investigation into the death of Agent Luis Aguilar. The GOM may use this case as an example of their support of DHS' efforts to curb border violence. It should also be expected that the GOM will reiterate that Navarro-Montes was held for several months awaiting an extradition request. This fact has been heavily reported in the media as well.

-- Drugs: Mexico is a central partner in USG efforts to combat drug trafficking and other trans-border threats. The 2000-mile border, with its high-volume ports of entry, and Mexico's maritime waters and airports, are vulnerable to criminal penetration. As much as 80 percent of all the cocaine consumed in the United States transits Mexico. Mexico is a major source of heroin, methamphetamines, and marijuana, and the primary placement point for criminal

proceeds from the U.S. into the international financial system. While taking aggressive measures to tackle the problem at home, President Calderon has also publicly urged the United States to boost our own efforts to drive down demand for narcotics and improve controls on arms, cash, and precursor chemicals smuggled into Mexico.

-- Arms Trafficking: The smuggling of weapons into Mexico from the U.S. represents a major concern for Mexican authorities. Approximately 95 percent of the illegal arms, including automatic weapons, smuggled into Mexico come from the U.S. The GOM would like to see the U.S. take stricter measures to better enforce existing U.S. legislation on arms exports, which the GOM believes is fundamental to winning the war against organized crime and drug trafficking.

ATF conducts all firearms traces of seized weapons in Mexico and also assist SEDENA in cases of ATF jurisdiction. E-Trace has been deployed to all nine U.S. Consulate Offices in Mexico. It is a means of electronically submitting a trace request via computer to ATF's National Tracing Center and providing the requestor with a response within ten days. An urgent trace can be submitted and received within 24 hours. E-Trace is available to both U.S. and Mexican law enforcement at these Consulate Offices. ATF is currently waiting for SSP to sign an E-Trace MOU to deploy E-Trace to the SSP at all 32 Mexican States.

DHS continues to work on a number of important initiatives with Mexico involving arms trafficking. ICE recently initiated &Operation Armas Cruzadas8 to combat the smuggling of weapons from the United States into Mexico. As part of this initiative, DHS and GOM agencies will partner in unprecedented bilateral interdiction, investigation, an intelligence-sharing activities to identify, disrupt, and dismantle cross-border criminal networks that smuggle weapons from the United States into Mexico.

Moreover, DOD through the Defense Attache has established a close working relationship with SEDENA relative to firearms seizures. Through "Operation Chuck Wagon" they assist SEDENA in identifying high caliber and military type weapons (i.e. LAW rockets, RPG's and grenades).

-- Southern Border: Mexico's southern border remains extremely vulnerable to illegal immigration, trafficking in persons, and the smuggling of all manner of contraband,

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including drugs/precursors. It is an issue of great concern to the GOM, which attributes its lack of success in dealing with the problem to the difficult local terrain; the lack of enforcement infrastructure; the historically informal nature of the border, particularly among local residents; and the inadequate border security efforts of its southern neighbors, Guatemala and Belize. Nevertheless, progress in securing Mexico's southern border is of vital importance in achieving our own security objectives. Last year Calderon announced plans for a Safe Southern Border Program, designed to strengthen Mexico's law enforcement efforts in the south, improve treatment of illegal immigrants, and create a guest worker program for Central Americans. In your meetings, you may wish to inquire about the status of Mexican efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy to secure the southern frontier.

-- Maritime Migration.: The GOM is concerned about the increase in Cuban migration through Mexico to the United States. Many GOM officials fear that if the migration increases -- or there is a mass migration from Cuba -- the United States will shut down its borders and look to Mexico to solve what it considers a U.S. problem.

-- Maritime Operations: The USCG and SEMAR are working exceptionally well together tackling maritime issues: smuggling, port security, search and rescue, and infrastructure protection. SEMAR would like complete interoperability with the USCG across all mission areas.

-- Disaster relief: SEDENA and SEMAR are very involved in disaster relief and consider themselves experts. The assisted the United States during Hurricane Katrina. Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap> /
PARNELL